



# NEWS RELEASE

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## EVENT RECALLS NAZI ATROCITY

By Anna Morelock  
Staff writer

Soldiers and civilians gathered at Riley's Conference Center April 26 to remember victims, heroes and survivors of the Holocaust. Dr. William Samelson, who lived through the event, spoke of his experiences.

"I like to emphasize the experiences of individuals," Samelson said. By telling individual stories and painting a "living picture," Samelson said, he hoped to give people a better perspective of the Holocaust and make them more sensitive to what people went through.

Samelson was almost 11 years old and living in Poland with his parents, older brother and younger sister when he first heard whispered worries about the events unfolding before World War II.

"Apparently the world stood still. The world was silent," he said about reactions to threats from Adolf Hitler.

Hitler's threats became a reality for Samelson on Sept. 1, 1939, when the sound of air raid sirens pierced the air.

The Germans moved into Samelson's town. Samelson and others were forbidden to pray and assemble. Eventually they were confined to a ghetto that occupied one-tenth of the town and was surrounded by barbed wire and guarded with dogs.

"All we cherished disappeared overnight," Samelson said.

Samelson heard rumors of people arriving in the ghetto who weren't Soldiers but execution squads. After various methods of disposing of the people were found too inefficient, the Nazis used the inhabitants of the ghetto for slave labor to build extermination camps.

"We were used up like you use up sandpaper, like you use up soap," Samelson said of the way they were treated.

"The might of the German military machine was awesome," he recalled. Although he said the resistance was hopeless, it didn't stop people from finding small ways to try. People prayed. Children were educated in the ghetto despite it being forbidden.

"Resistance has many faces," he added.

One day the family was called from its home by loud speakers announcing a resettlement throughout the ghetto.

The prisoners were lined up. If they met a certain height requirement, they were sent one direction. If they didn't, they went the other.

Samelson recalled his sister's turn at the yardstick. She was 7 years old. She tried to stand on her toes, but couldn't reach the requirement. She was sent one direction.

Samelson was almost 13; his brother three years older. They met the requirement and were sent the opposite direction from their sister.

Samelson's mother, who was in her 30s, met the requirement. She told the brothers they would take care of themselves, but to never forget what happened. She followed her daughter.

That was the last time Samelson saw his mother and sister. He and his brother were taken to Buchenwald, a Nazi labor camp.

During this time, Samelson's father was in prison in Siberia with part of the Polish army.

At Buchenwald, Samelson and the other prisoners were shaved with a dull razor, dipped into a vat of formaldehyde and brought into a shower room.

"Gas didn't come out, but neither did water," he recounted.

He registered at the camp with his mother's maiden name so he and his brother could remain together. He then became number 116411.

During part of his interment, Samelson worked in a bazooka factory where he molded small pieces of metal to form a triggering device. Samelson said he tampered with the devices and fantasized about a Nazi trying to blow up a tank. In his daydream, when the Nazi pulled the trigger, nothing happened and he could see the astonishment on the soldier's face.

Samelson was liberated by Gen. George S. Patton in April 1945. He and his brother were carried to a medical van. They weighed 62 pounds each.

Samelson and his brother were eventually reunited with their father.

Not all Nazis were bad, Samelson recalled. After being liberated, he was assigned a tutor. She was once a Nazi. She was also blind, but she saw Samelson better than

anyone who had sight, he said. Americans liberated his body, his teacher liberated my soul, he recalled.

He also spoke of a Nazi supervisor at Buchenwald. Samuelson recounted being called into his office, from where people didn't return.

While mopping, Samuelson stole a sandwich wrapped in newspaper from the supervisor's coat. He thought he would be caught and punished, but was instead called back daily to the office. Each time he left with a sandwich wrapped in newspaper to share with the others.

"There is good and there is bad in all of us." Samuelson said. "It is our choice."